

Charge Cut, 9 Panthers Convicted

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LOS ANGELES, Dec. 23—A seven-month-long Black Panther trial marked by murder and courtroom brawling ended today with two defendants acquitted and nine others cleared of murder conspiracy charges but convicted on lesser charges of conspiracy to possess illegal weapons.

Eighteen defendants originally went on trial on charges arising out of a four-hour shootout with police at Black Panther headquarters in Watts in December 1969.

But one of the defendants was murdered, three jumped bail, one turned state's evidence and another was tried separately.

The nine found guilty today of conspiracy to possess illegal explosives, firebombs and a machinegun face penalties between one and three years when they come up for sentencing on Jan. 13.

The eight-woman, four-man jury, half of them blacks, deliberated for 11 days.

Of the twelve defendants completing the trial, two were cleared of all charges and nine were found guilty of the single charge of conspiracy to possess illegal weapons. The jury was asked to continue deliberation on charges of conspiracy to commit assault, on which it was deadlocked. Seven of the defendants face that charge.

Among those convicted today were Elmer Pratt, 29, former head of the Los Angeles Black Panther Party, whose wife Sandra, 23, another defendant, was found murdered in a Watts street on Nov. 5.

The discovery of her body led to a courtroom brawl last month in which a faction led by Pratt, supporting exiled Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, battled with another faction supporting party founder Huey Newton. The trial had to be recessed for four days while tempers cooled.

Strict security measures were adopted for the reading of today's verdicts.

The charges on which defendants were found not guilty included conspiracy to murder and assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer.